

VZCZCXRO1380
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHFN #0591/01 2711831
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 281831Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1411
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 FREETOWN 000591

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W, INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/28/2017

TAGS: KDEM PGOV PINR SL

SUBJECT: POST ELECTION SIERRA LEONE: VIOLENCE SUBSIDES AND TRANSITION UNDERWAY

REF: A. FREETOWN 573

1B. FREETOWN 566

Classified By: DCM Elizabeth Pratt for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)1.

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. The week following the announcement of Ernest Koroma as the new President of Sierra Leone had its bumps but was positive overall. Incidents of violence broke out in the immediate aftermath but soon decreased significantly as people returned to their everyday lives. The media was full of congratulatory wishes from the international and business community to the people of Sierra Leone and key stakeholders for their role in ensuring the success of the electoral process. The Parliament held its first meeting, electing their leadership and establishing a positive tone of unity and service. In a bid to ensure regional cooperation and security, President Koroma took a short trip to meet with the leaders of neighboring countries. Upon his return, he announced the members of a Transition Team that would help him assess the current state of the government and determine the way forward. While much remains to be done to ensure a smooth transition over the next few months, the new APC-led government appears to be on the right track to ensure democracy reigns and stability continues in Sierra Leone. END SUMMARY.

INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM FOR ELECTIONS

12. (U) Key stakeholders in the international community have expressed great satisfaction with the management of the elections and the peaceful transition of authority after the announcement of results. Diplomatic missions, including post, issued press releases congratulating GoSL, National Electoral Commission (NEC), the media, and the people of Sierra Leone for the conduct of credible and democratic elections and for serving as a role model for other recovering nations. International media coverage was overwhelmingly positive and declared Sierra Leone an example for other fledgling democracies in the region

13. (U) On September 19, a 3-member ECOWAS delegation returned to Freetown to conduct a post-election assessment. The delegation, led by ECOWAS Executive Secretary Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas of Nigeria, met with President Koroma to ensure him of the continued support of all ECOWAS member states and to encourage a tone of reconciliation and unity as he established a new government. The delegation also met with outgoing President Kabbah and members of the international community, thanking them for their particular role in ensuring the electoral process went smoothly. In their September 19 meeting with the international community, attended by CDA and poloff, Dr. Chambas noted that the real test for Sierra Leone would be in the coming months as the public would expect to see the immediate rewards of democracy, such as economic improvement, the provision of social services, and an increase in job opportunities.

Considering these expectations, he encouraged the new GOSL to focus primarily on institution rebuilding and the economic and social development of the country.

¶4. (U) The UN Peace Building Commission (PBC) also held a New York-Freetown DVC on September 20 to review the elections and examine PBC next steps. Dutch Ambassador Frank Majoer led the discussion from New York. Freetown participants included electoral stakeholders, including representatives from the GoSL, National Electoral Commission (NEC), the security sector, civil society and the international community. The PBC commended the many players who ensured a credible electoral process and concluded with recommendations for President Koroma's administration similar to those made by ECOWAS. In his summation, Majoer encouraged efforts at national unity and reconciliation.

ISOLATED ACTS OF VIOLENCE SUBSIDE

¶5. (SBU) In the immediate days following the September 17 announcement of election results, a number of incidents of violence were reported in Freetown and throughout the country. Supporters of the losing Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) looted and vandalized their Freetown party headquarters in a "pay yourself" operation, resulting in significant damage and theft. One looter was electrocuted. While immediate reports blamed overly jubilant opposition APC supporters, Sierra Leone police have since discovered some of the stolen property in the hands of SLPP members.

¶6. (U) In addition, several Nigerian-owned businesses were vandalized in Freetown. The Nigerian High Commission subsequently issued a press statement urging a halt to such acts of violence. Nigerian business owners went on strike

FREETOWN 00000591 002 OF 003

and closed their businesses for a week. Some observers speculate that these attacks were motivated by anger over former Nigerian President Obasanjo's visit to Freetown earlier this year during which he publicly supported SLPP candidate Berewa.

¶7. (U) Sporadic violence was reported throughout the country and SLPP government officials alleged incidents of intimidation from APC supporters in their communities. These incidents varied from the looting of government offices, the vandalizing of personal homes, and physical threats and resulted in any officials going into "hiding" to avoid further incidents.

¶8. (SBU) Since his assumption of office, President Koroma has delivered a consistent message that violence would not be tolerated, which encouraged the population to remain calm, according to UN personnel posted throughout Sierra Leone. They noted that generally the post election period was smoother than expected. The Sierra Leonean Police also responded appropriately to arrest those responsible for acts of violence which deterred further incidents.

KOROMA APPOINTS CIVIL SOCIETY TRANSITION TEAM

¶9. (U) Immediately after being sworn in, President Koroma ordered the formation of a transition team, led by Vice President Sam-Sumana. Koroma also announced that he had asked KPMG to conduct ministerial audits. The transition team includes individuals from government, civil society and the media. It is tasked with evaluating the effectiveness of all government ministries and overseeing a smooth and comprehensive transition of authority. While some team members are staunch APC supporters, the rest are from civil society and are considered impartial, and show no evidence of political aspirations. The team's initial assessment is due by October 1 with a final assessment prior to the Presidential Inauguration, which should take place at the end of Ramadan.

10.(U) To avoid a standstill in government operations, Koroma urged all current Ministers to stay on and ordered other government employees to return to work and cooperate fully with the transition team's investigations. President Koroma met with all ministers on September 18 to urge their continued cooperation until he had named his cabinet. He promised them that acts of intimidation against them would not be tolerated and urged them to emerge from hiding, where some had fled for fear of reprisals. Minister of Foreign Affairs and unsuccessful SLPP Vice Presidential candidate, Momodu Koroma, told the press that the meeting was "frank," "cordial," and "confidence-building."

THE NEW PARLIAMENTARY LEADERSHIP

¶11. (SBU) On September 25, the newly elected members of parliament were sworn in and chose their leadership. The members of Parliament - by their own definition - are a younger and less experienced group. They have agreed that the focus of their first few months in office should be on training. (NOTE: The general makeup of the Parliament is notably different than the previous group. While the previous Parliament was dominated by highly educated, older males, this Parliament has more women, youth, and those who are minimally educated and more 'grassroots.' While this will indeed require more guidance and training from key international stakeholders, it also might ensure that the decisions of Parliament more accurately reflect the needs of average Sierra Leoneans. END NOTE)

¶12. (SBU) Honorable Justice Abel Stronge is the new Speaker of Parliament, winning 115 of the 123 votes cast. Stronge served in the judiciary for 35 years and was most recently the Justice of the Appeals Court. Stronge is respected by a high majority of Parliamentarians regardless of party affiliation. The comments made by the newly appointed Minority Leader, Momoh Pujeh, served to illustrate the overall desire of the Parliament to serve as an independent legislative body, undivided by political differences and united by the oath of office. The formal inauguration of Parliament is scheduled for October 5.

¶13. (U) To underscore Parliament's independence, Koroma has announced that he will not fill the position of Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, since he believes the Parliament must be free of interference. As a former member of Parliament, he noted that an independent Parliament would be better able to ensure "checks and balances" within the government. In his opinion, the passing of the Parliamentary Service Commission Act, which improved the conditions of service for

FREETOWN 00000591 003 OF 003

Parliamentarians, negates the need for a Minister to represent their interests.

KOROMA MEETS THE NEIGHBORS ON FIRST OFFICIAL TRIP

¶14. (U) While Vice President Sam-Sumana addressed the incidents of violence at home in Sierra Leone, Koroma embarked on his first official trip abroad on September 21 with a 17 member delegation to meet with the leadership in Liberia, Guinea and Burkino Faso. Koroma stated the purpose of these meetings was to reinforce the important role of the Mano River Union to ensure peace and security in the subregion. In Burkino Faso, Koroma met with the President Compaoré, who also is President of the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS). ECOWAS had been very supportive of the electoral process and Koroma's visit presented an opportunity for him to affirm Sierra Leone's continuing commitment to ECOWAS. While some Sierra Leoneans were dissatisfied that Koroma chose to depart while the security situation in the electoral aftermath was uncertain, APC spokesperson Alpha Kanu stressed that the trip was necessary to ensure regional stability.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) COMMENT: While Koroma has initiated positive steps, not much is known yet about the upcoming plans and priorities of the new government. Koroma has made few public appearances so far, has said very little publicly, and speculation is abundant about who will fill ministerial slots. Reports say that Koroma will name his ministers by next week and that individuals in the diaspora are being tapped to fill cabinet positions due to the lack of depth of expertise within the APC. The creation of a Transition Team is a positive sign that reflects a sound desire to ensure a measured approach. Avoiding a rush to form a cabinet before understanding the country's needs, condition of the ministries and available government resources is wise. His transition team, though, may be hindered by time and resources in producing truly effective and thoughtful recommendations for the way forward. Koroma also has to manage the expectations of many supporters who, unsuited for governance, still want dividends for delivering him the Presidency. While mistakes might be made along the way, all signs indicate that Koroma will continue to work to unite Sierra Leone and address the issues that have impeded development and growth. END COMMENT.

PERRY